

# Nigerian roads where kidnappers unleash mayhem

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**By Evelyn Usman**

The rising incidence of kidnapping has assumed a ubiquitous trend in Nigeria. Almost on daily basis, Nigerians are inundated with news of the abduction of unsuspecting persons, in different parts of the country.

From the North to the South and the East to the West, the story is the same! These unscrupulous elements spring out from nowhere, to abduct defenceless Nigerians, take them to their hideouts, from where they put calls across to victims' relatives for payment of ransom.

The early stage of kidnapping in Nigeria was mainly for ritual purpose. In the south-west region, it was called gbomogbomo. There were also instances where individuals were abducted during communal wars and held as bait for strategic trade-offs.

Another dimension to kidnapping was introduced in the Niger Delta region around 1990, where militants engaged in hostage-taking to press home their demands for better living conditions in the area.

Though the trend has abated in that region, unfortunately, it was embraced by youths in the South East region who considered it a lucrative business.

Abia and Anambra states were critical hotbeds for kidnappers, whose targets were parents and relatives of the rich. At a point, indigenes stopped visiting their home towns, out of fear of being caught in the kidnappers' webs.

**Boko Haram**

Insurgents also introduced kidnapping in their bloody game. In this case, they would storm schools and villages, abduct victims in large numbers and whisk them to their hideouts. Sometimes, these victims, especially young girls faced terrible abuse. Some of them forced into early marriage and those who were not Muslims forced to convert.

The abduction of 276 Chibok girls in April 2014, in Borno State and additional 200 girls from Dapchi, Yobe state, in 2018, by members of the Boko Haram, are examples. Till date, some of these girls are still missing. In particular, is Leah Sharibu.

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### **Herdsmen, routes of attacks**

Today, the trend has assumed a frightening and worrisome dimension, as herdsmen seem to have taken over, terrorising Nigerians all over the country. On the Abuja – Kaduna expressway, they attack motorists and whisk them away, both in the day time and at night. This expressway is notorious for kidnapping and frequent armed robbery activities and has become a hub for robbers who see abduction and murder as lucrative.

Other dangerous roads where these herdsmen kidnappers operate in the north are Birnin Gwari-Kaduna Road; Kaduna- Saminaka-Jos road; Kaduna-Kachia road; Kagarko-Jere road; Birnin Gwari-Kagara-Tegina road; Sarkin Power-Birnin Gwari route; and Minna-Lambata-Diko-Kaduna axis.

They also include the Nassarawa Shendam road; Obi/Keana/Awe road; Akwanga/Keffi road; Keffi/Nasarawa/Toto road; Gudi-Keffi road; Gudi Garaku road; Nasarawa-Toto-Gadabuke road and Akwanga/Abuja road.

In addition are the Niger Suleja – Lambata, Bida road; and roads in Kushaka, Kurebe, Pandogari, Gidigori, Kusherki, Koregi, Alawa, Kwaki, Bataro, Chikuba, Shafa, Kauri, Zazzaga in Rafi Local Government Areas of Niger State.

Roads in Kakangi, Gayam, Dan Ganji, Maganda, Dawari and Kazage. Gusau-Magami-Dansadau, Kuceri-Danjibga-Keta-Wanke, Kaura- Namoda -Moriki-Shinkafi, Zurmi-Jibia – Katsina, and Talata Mafara/Tsafe In Sokoto State and Issa and Rabah Local Government Areas are also dangerous zones, known for acts of banditry.

In addition, it was gathered that herdsmen operate a thriving kidnap network between Umutu, Urhonigbe and Abavo communities. Katsina Jibia – Gurbi – Kaura Namoda; Dutsinma – Kankara – Sheme – Faskari; Musawa – Matazu; Charanchi-Kankia-Kusada; Dandume – Sabuwa; Sheme – Kankara and Dutsinma – Funtua, which many motorists avoid between 6 pm and 6 am. Jibia – Gurbi – Kaura Namoda road which links Katsina and Zamfara states is, also considered dreadful.

### **Middle Belt**

The Sankera axis comprising three Local Government Areas: Katsina/Ala, Ukum and Logo, have had to contend with issues of kidnappings which usually occur on the over 150km stretch of Katsina/Ala – Wukari road, linking Benue and Taraba states. Also, Wukari-Takum and Wukari-Ibbi roads in Taraba State are notorious for kidnapping.

### **South East**

The South East is not spared either. Some of the roads prone to kidnappers attacks include Enugu-Ugwogo-Nsukka Road; Nsukka-Adani-Onitsha Road; 9th Mile-Nsukka-Makurdi road; Enugu-Onitsha Expressway, particularly at Ugwu-Onyeama valley; and Enugu-Port Harcourt road.

Kidnapping is yet to abate at Ukpabi-Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state; Ugwu-Onyeama along Enugu-Onitsha road; Ebonyi Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway; Abakaliki-Afikpo Expressway; Amasiri-Okigwe Expressway; Ivo-Oso Edda Road and some roads linking the hinterlands in the state.

### **Edo**

Kidnapping in Edo State is almost on daily basis, as herdsmen intercept motorists and whisk them into the forest, from where negotiations for ransom take place.

Some roads prone to these attacks are Upper Sokponba, Ehor axis of the Benin-Auchi road; Ogbemudia Farm; Okada, along Benin –Ore-Lagos expressway, and Avbiana in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area of the State.

In Edo Central, kidnapping is common along Ubiaja-Ewohimi-Agbor Road, while roads across the six Local Governments Areas in Edo North regularly record cases of kidnapping by suspected herdsmen.

## **Delta**

The South/ South region is not safe either. In Delta State, for instance, these herdsmen commonly kidnap many of their victims on their farmlands. In the process, some of them are killed.

Some of the roads where kidnapping takes place in this region are Edo-Ogwashi-Otulu-Atuma-Akwukwu-Igbo Road, considered as a quiet stretch into a dead zone.

Others are : Ebu-Ukala-Onicha-Olona road; Issele-Uku-Otulu road and Issele-Uku-Onicha-Olona road.

Issele-Uku-Ubulu-Uku road, in Delta State, is another dreaded route. On January 5, 2016, the monarch of the Ubulu-Uku Kingdom in Aniocha South Local Government Area of the State, HRM Akaeze Edward Ofulue III, was abducted by suspected Fulani herdsmen

. Fifteen days later, members of a vigilante group found his decomposing remains at the stomp of a tree in the bush at Umunede, Ika North-East local government area, the boundary between Delta and Edo States. The Umutu – Urhonigbe-Abavo and Ekuku- Agbor roads are also notorious for kidnapping.

Other notorious roads prone to herdsmen attack in the South-South include Okurekpo community road in Ethiope East Local Government Area and the Ode Bridge axis in Ethiope East in Delta State.

On Bomadi-Ohoror road, activities of bandits and herdsmen who kill and maim commuters have become worrisome. The road traverses four local government areas of Delta namely Bomadi, Patani, Ughelli South and Ughelli North.

## **Women lament**

Agadama community women lamented that they were often raped by herdsmen in their farms along Agadama road. Urhonigbe portion of the Agbor-Obiaruku-Abraka-Warri road was also found to be another area of concern.

In addition, some of the roads notorious for herdsmen attacks in Rivers State, are Emohua-Elele-Alimini axis of the East-West road; Isiokpo-Elele axis of the Port Harcourt-Owerri Road; Omagwa – Ubima; Isiokpo- Ubima; Elele - Umudioga; Egbeda, Ubima, Omoku, and Elele-Ndele Rumuji-Emuoha-Choba -Port Harcourt roads.

## **South West**

The scenario is not different in the South West region either. In Osun and Ekiti states, affected roads include Esa-Oke junction; Iwaraja-Efon Alaaye; Ile-Ife junction; Iloko junction; Ipetu-Ile – Ilesha; Ilesha-Ile-Oluji; Ilesha -Osogbo, and Ilesha- Akure.

Along the Ondo Auga road in Akoko, more than 20 kidnap incidents have occurred there.

Others roads are: Akure- Ijare; Akure-Owo- Oba Akoko- Akungba; Oka Akoko – Isua Akoko; Ipele- Ido Ani; Ondo-Ore; Ondo-Akure and Akure-Benin. Ogun Siun-Ogere; Obafemi-Owode; Abeokuta-Lagos; Abeokuta-Sokoto; Ilaro-Owode-Idi-Iroko; Odeda-Ogunmakin; Fidiwo-Obafemi; Sagamu-Ogijo-Badary; and Ijebu Igbo-Oru-Awa.

In Ekiti State, Ikere-Akure road and communities like Iyemero, Ayede, and Oloje are also danger zones.

For Oyo State, Ilorin-Ogbomoso road, in Atisbo Local Government Area of the state was also found unsafe as a result of kidnapping by suspected herdsmen.

## **Kidnap suspect boasts**

Last year October, the Zone 2 Command of the Nigeria Police Force, Onikan, Lagos, busted a kidnap/ robbery syndicate responsible for several abductions of unsuspecting persons in the South West Region of the country, arresting six members.

Sophisticated weapons and ammunition which included AK 47 riffles, Ak 49 riffles, American Pump Action , among others were recovered from the suspects, who were paraded by the Assistant Inspector General of Police, AIG

Mohammed Illyasu.

They confessed to have their hideouts in forests spread across Ogun, Oyo, Ekiti Osun, Kwara and Lagos states, where victims were kept until a ransom was paid.

A woman Police Inspector, a Nigeria Security Civil Defence Corps, NSCDC and prominent businessmen were among those kidnapped so far.

Unfortunately, one of the victims, Alhaji Oro, was shot dead by the gang, after collecting N 4 million ransom from his relatives, with his remains buried in the forest.

## **Betrayal**

In the case of the NSCDC official identified as Are, he kept some cattle in the custody of one of the herders to graze. It was this employee of his that gave him out to the gang. He was kidnapped on his way to the farm at Eggua in the Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State and held in captivity for three days in the forest before he regained freedom upon payment of N3 million ransom.

Late Alhaji Oro, a big-time cattle rearer, who had his farm in Eggua, was kidnapped on his way to the farm and held hostage for four days. Despite payment of the demanded N4m ransom, these boys shot and killed him. They confessed to have traced another target, identified as Umaru at Awaiye in Oyo State, trekked from Ogun State and were on the road for two weeks. They ambushed him on his way to the farm and successfully seized him. He was in captivity for two days before he was released after payment of N1 million ransom.

They also targeted one Alhaji Adegoke, near Iseyin in Oyo State, during which they made a demand of N25m ransom from his relatives. But while that was on, one of them with an AK47 rifle was on guard while others went out for another operation.

It was at this point that fate played in the victim's favour, as the man on guard slept off and Alhaji Adegoke escaped and cleverly hid in the forest.

On realizing he had escaped, the raging kidnappers, in their large number, scattered into the forest, shooting sporadically with the intention to have him killed.

## **Confession**

Identities of the suspects who all confessed to being from the Fulani tribe but born in Kwara and Ogun states were: Adamu Saliu, 25; Ibrahim Mohammed, 33; Abubakar Sadiq, 24; Tambaye Mohammed, 25; Adamu Suleiman and Akanni Musa, 38.

One of them, 25-year-old Adamu Saliu, said " I am a Fulani man, born in Ogun State. I sell cows. I was introduced to kidnapping by a friend. We are many that are into this and there are different groups. Each group operates on its own. We come out of the forest, block the road and kidnap victims. We would carry them on motorbikes, into the forest where they would remain until a ransom is paid for their release.

" We don't know the profession of some of our victims before they are kidnapped. For others, it is based on information. The forest is so big that it can take as many victims as we wish.

"In Ogun State, we make use of forests in Shagamu, Ogijo, Sagbada, Ibua, Odumaki. And in Lagos, forest in Epe is used to keep victims.

"We give victims garri ( cassava flour) and palm oil or garri with water, depending on what they want. At times, my members would serve them with raw cassava. I have never slept with any of the female victims but some of my colleagues did.

"We collected N1 million ransom for the release of the policewoman, out of which I got N 100,000. For the Civil Defenceman, we collected N3 million ransom from his relatives, out of which I got N 200,000. One of us, Mohammed, gave us information on his movement. He (informant )got N400,000 out of the N3 million ransom. We also collected N4 million ransom from one Alhaji Oro who was later shot dead".

## **Why we killed Alhaji Oro**

When asked why Alhaji Aro was killed, Saliu explained, “ he stood as surety for two of our members who were earlier arrested for stealing cows. But they fled when they were expected to report at the police station. Alhaji Oro was arrested and asked to produce them and he did. While I was in prison over cow theft, with some of those Alhaji earlier stood surety for, they were angry at him for showing the Police where they were. They resolved to kidnap and collect ransom from his relatives in order to avenge what he did.

“But when he was kidnapped, one of them shot him dead because he recognized him. His corpse was dumped in the bush. Our weapons are kept in the bush after each operation. I used money realized to buy motorcycles which I gave out on hire purchase”, he stated.

Others also opened up on their roles in the series of kidnap, blaming their indulgence on the devil.

AlG Illyasu disclosed that efforts were still on to arrest other members of the syndicate, adding that he had placed his men on strategic locations in Lagos and Ogun states where kidnappers operate.

## **Rape, deaths**

When victims are taken onto the forests or other hideouts, most times, women are raped. Some, right in from of their husbands and male children.

In one of the videos that went viral, a lady in her 20s was seen being gang-raped in the forest, amidst struggle.

Some of the male victims who narrated their ordeals revealed that men were also not spared, as some of their captors who were gays, took turns to have anal sex with them during their two days stay in the forest.

For some of these villains, human life means nothing. They kill at will and abandon corpses of victims in the forests.

Sometimes, these corpses were dumped in the farmlands, to avoid the disturbing stench, and at times buried in shallow graves, even when ransom had been paid.

## **Community connivance**

Saturday Vanguard investigation showed that there is possible connivance of some communities in this kidnap saga, as some youths and traditional heads in communities around forests used as dens by kidnappers are aware of the on-goings there.

For instance, they were accused of selling palm oil and cassava flakes, otherwise known as garri, which are the common food taken by kidnappers and their hostages.

## **Villagers as Spies**

Some of these villagers who spoke with Saturday Vanguard on strict anonymity revealed that some villagers act as spies for these kidnappers. But they are afraid to reveal their identities as that could spell doom for them and members of their families.

For instance, information gathered from some of these villagers revealed that those who act as spies, in almost all the states, were stationed in strategic places to alert kidnappers of the presence of security agents.

They were also stationed not too far from the location where a ransom is to be dropped, acting sometimes as lunatics, all in a bid to ensure that the negotiator was not being accompanied by security agents, to designated points of collection.

Whenever the presence of an intruder was suspected during payment of ransom, the spy as gathered, alerts the kidnapper through signs such as a whistle, throwing of stones or flag a red or white rag to the direction of his instructor who could either be on top of a tree or watching from a distance.

At that moment, the location where the money would be dropped would be changed. Sometimes, this could infuriate the kidnapper and could lead to the death of the victim.

At other times, it could take days of a location change, before instruction would be given to the negotiator to drop the money.

Information at Saturday Vanguard disposal also revealed that some of these villagers who act as spies ended up picking the ransom from where it was dropped. Thereafter, they would be instructed by the kidnapper on phone, to take it far inside the forest, from where it would be collected from them.

It was reliably gathered that these spies were paid between N2000 and N5000 after each watch. Unfortunately, they were reportedly killed at the end of an assignment, to avoid giving the kidnappers mode of operation to security agents.

## Brutes

Again, these kidnappers, whether herdsmen or other groups, don't spare any member who violates their rules.

In an interview with one of them who was arrested along the Abuja/Kaduna expressway, some time ago, he revealed that in his group, no member was permitted to rape any light in completion lady, except their leader. He said, " anybody who rapes a yellow girl, will be killed because only our leader is allowed to have her".

He further stated that whenever they went on the operation, they went for dark complexion ladies that would go round members, before they were released.

Another offence that attracts death of kidnappers by their members, is when any of them is arrested.

One of them who was arrested along the Benin /Auchi expressway recently, begged to be killed, revealing that if he was lucky to be released, he would never go back to his colleagues in the bush, else, he would be killed. This is to avoid a sell-out from the arrested suspect.

## Relocation

Saturday Vanguard also gathered that whenever a member of any of the kidnap groups was arrested, his colleagues would immediately vacate the part of the forest they occupied. This, as gathered is to avert any likely invasion of their hideout by security agents through the arrested member.

## Arrests

There have been several arrests of these criminal gangs that would stop at nothing to achieve their devilish aim.

In Niger State, for instance, 240 suspected criminals, among who were 87 kidnap suspects, were arrested between January and October 2020, alone, with 40 abducted victims rescued by the Police.

In Kano State, 17 kidnap suspects were arrested in the last four weeks,

There had been several other arrests of kidnap suspects across the country, most of who gave startling revelations of their modes of operations.

Unfortunately, rather than witnessing a decrease in kidnap cases, it has remained unabated.

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